1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

dust. Dry leaves kept at hand are then swiftly placed over the spark, and fanned by blowing into a flame. Under favourable and absolutely dry conditions fire can be made by this method in under a minute. But it is hard work, and the European trying for the first time may work for five minutes before getting a flame. 372

Ritual fires and sex dichotomy. Position of strangers.

There is no family gathering for the meal, however, for one of the fundamental principles underlying society in these islands is that those who have performed the Maki rite, that is to say practically the whole male population, have thereby become so holy that they may not eat with women. This sex dichotomy which decrees that all the men, apart from small boys who have not yet taken their first step in the Maki, must eat separately from women, is one of the most marked features of Small Island society, and has far-reaching results. It is largely bound up with the question of fires, which in themselves, when lit by a member of the Maki hierarchy, are holy. Thus one of the chief acts at the moment of consecration during this rite is the lighting of a new fire, with brands from which (according to one account) the oven on which his meals are henceforth to be cooked must be kindled. Tales dealing with the miraculous origin of certain fires as related on Atchin will be given in a later volume. 264 372 562

One of the results of this sanctity of fires, which affected the writer's entire outlook and conditioned much of his work, was the fact that he himself, not having taken Maki rank, was unsanctified. He was therefore unable to eat with the men, nor could he eat with women, since had he done this he would have been classed as one and therefore automatically debarred from knowledge of men's secret rites. So he was forced to eat alone. This resulted in practically no contact with women, and in the fact that, lacking the ordinary meal-time companionship which in other countries, and indeed among themselves within the sex ban, is the time of greatest sociability, his attention was largely concentrated on the more formal, ritual life of the natives, of which this fire ban is one of the most salient characteristics. 123 264 562 609

It is therefore not as an honoured guest that the stranger from outside the closed ranks of the Maki hierarchy will be received at meal-time, but as a stranger from a different world, tolerated on account of his personality and his adherence to a race that may indeed be superior in many other ways, but yet one outside the pale of communal eating, to whom it is no insult not to offer food, for the simple reason that it is impossible. 264 609

If, thus, it is desired to make a correct approach, meal-times are to be avoided as bringing too obviously to the fore the abyss separating the holy from the unclean who have never, by means of sacrifice, wiped out the stain of having, as boys, eaten with women. There are, it is true, 264 562 564